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## NIGERIAN WOMEN PRISON WORKERS' EXPERIENCES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

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**ABSTRACT** This paper investigated the types of violent incidents experienced by female prison officers (FPOs) and likely implications while on the job. For a qualitative analysis, 10 focus group discussions consisting of 6–10 participants and 4 in-depth interviews were conducted with selected FPOs within the junior, middle, and senior cadres. Data collected were analyzed using content analysis. Respondents reported both verbal and physical violence on the job, with higher incidences of the former. Verbal violence experienced was from both junior and senior particularly male officers and inmates. FPOs encountered more physical violence from inmates than from their male colleagues, although senior officers resorted to more covert tactics. Respondents perceived these occupational experiences to impact negatively on their psychological health, social well-being, and job-satisfaction. The paper concludes by highlighting some policy options.

**Key Words:** Workplace violence; Social well-being; Job satisfaction; Psychological health.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on workplace violence (WV) experienced by female prison officers (FPOs) in selected prisons in southwestern Nigeria. There has been little or no studies conducted on WV experienced by FPOs in Nigeria. Previous studies have focused on WV in Western societies (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2004; Di Martino et al., 2003; Queensland Government, 2002; Bouche, 2001). These studies on WV suggest that the overall occurrence is on the increase, and it affects a substantial part of the workforce globally (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2004; Di Martino et al., 2003).

According to Paoli and Merllie (2001), about 9 percent of workers in Europe are exposed to certain violence in the workplace. In another study that compared workers' likelihood of being intimidated and victimized in the workplace in 5 selected European Union (EU) countries, Di Martino et al. (2003) found that Finland had the highest risk (15%), followed by the Netherlands (14%), United Kingdom (14%), Italy (4%) and Portugal (4%). In yet another study conducted in Europe, Zapf et al. (2003) estimated that between 1 and 4 percent of employees in Europe may have experienced severe violence in the workplace, while between 8 and 10 percent seldom experienced WV. In France, Paoli and Merllie (2001) found that 10 percent of workers were found to be exposed to varying levels of victimization in the workplace. In Australia, using data from international research, it was estimated that between 400,000 and 2 million Australians were victimized at work in 2001 (<http://cwpp.slq.qld.gov.au/bba/book.html>). The high prevalence of WV above demands urgent attention in order to reduce the frequent occurrence

of violence in the workplace as well as to ensure a friendly work environment for workers.

Researches have pointed out that there are gender differences in WV victimization (Fayankinnu, 2003a; Akinbulumo, 2003; Di Martino et al., 2003). For example, in a study on WV conducted in France, Hirigoyen (2001) found that 70% of the victims were women. Similarly, Paoli and Merllie (2001) studied work conditions of workers and reported that, on the average, more women than men were exposed to intimidation in the European Union (EU). In a recent study conducted among some European countries, the European Parliament indicated that women, compared to men, are more frequent victims of every type of violence, be it vertical harassment of a subordinate by a superior or horizontal violence within a peer group, or both (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006).

In Nigeria, the few studies conducted in the area of WV appear to have neglected issues of violence in male-dominated occupations, such as the prison service, particularly as it relates to female officers thereby making it difficult to ascertain the actual number of women who may be victims in such occupations (Fayankinnu, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Akinbulumo, 2003; Aderinto et al., 2006). The studies suggest a steady increase in violence in industrial organizations. According to these studies, women are more likely to be harassed or sexually assaulted than men. These general trends are not without implications for women in the workplace, as I submit below.

WV may increase stress, and reduce well-being of victims at work (Nielsen et al., 2004; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2001; Leymann, 1996), affect job-commitment and performance (Einarsen et al., 2003; Ayoko et al., 2003; Fayankinnu, 2004, 2003c; Onyeonoru & Fayankinnu, 2001), and potentially influences their intention to leave the job (Djurkovic et al., 2004). The foregoing chain of outcomes constitutes a serious problem that tends to render all victims of WV vulnerable in the workplace. The objectives of the paper is to look into the details of the catalogue of WV in the particular workplace setting of state prisons in Nigeria.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION

Attempts to conceptualize WV have been problematic given the complexity inherent in the meaning as well as usage of the term. Hence, some researchers have conceptualized WV as strictly physically aggressive behaviors, such as assaults (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005; Kraus et al., 1995; Dobash, 1992; Gelles, 1990), while others included threats of assault (e.g., Jenkins, 1996) and behavior inclined to psychological violence, such as name calling or shouting (Schat & Kelloway, 2003, 2000; Baron & Neuman, 1998; Rogers & Kelloway, 1997).

In spite of the fact that controversies still exist on what constitutes the definition of WV, a uniform system of categorizing violent acts in the workplace is being encouraged by researchers. To this end, Poilpot-Rocaboy (2006) identified four categories into which most WV incidents fall and defined the categories by the perpetrators' relationship to the victim and the motive for committing the violent act that I have tabulated into Table 1.

**Table 1.** Categorizing violent acts in the workplace

Type	Category	Relationship with Victim	Examples
I	Criminal	No legitimate relationship.	Robbery; Trespassing.
II	Customer/Client	Has business relationship in business setting.	Patient at a nursing home abuses a nurse or caregiver; inmate attacks prison officer.
III	Worker on Worker	Shares business environment as coworker.	Past or present employee threatens or assaults another employee; supervisor/subordinate threatens or assaults another.
IV	Personal and private	Has no business relationship but has other personal relationship with the victim.	Intimate partner assaults the other.

Source: Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006.

The four categories may be better understood in the words of Poilpot-Rocaboy:

In the first category [Type I], criminal intent, violence is perpetrated by an individual who has no legitimate relationship with the organization. The violence always ensues as a commission of a crime. A good example of this type of workplace violence is a robbery of a retail store. Violence perpetrated by a customer or client is included in the second category [Type II]; in this circumstance, the individual committing the act of violence has a relationship with the business. This type of violence commonly occurs in the health-care industry and the Civil Service field. In the third group [Type III], current or former employees victimize other employees. In the fourth category [Type IV], violence is perpetrated by an individual that does not necessarily have a relationship with the business but rather has a personal relationship with an employee of the organization in question. This type of violence includes victims of domestic assaults or individuals who have received threatening phone calls while at work from someone known to the victim (2006: 6-7).

This paper is interested in Types II and III, because data for Types I and IV were not collected. Thus, I operationally defined WV as any behavior, by an individual or individuals, which is intended to physically or psychologically harm a worker or workers, and occurs in a work-related context. There are some important features of this definition that need further attention. First, the definition is consistent with other definitions of WV utilized in the literature relating to human violence (Geen, 2001; Baron & Richardson, 1994). Second, it is sufficiently broad enough that it encompasses both physical and non-physical behaviors that fall within the ambit of WV. Third, it allows for violent behaviors that may arise from different sources within an organization in this study: e.g., supervisors, co-workers, and prison inmates.

## THE LITERATURE

Several studies have been conducted to identify the predictors of WV (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2004; Di Martino et al., 2003; Queensland Government, 2002; Bouche, 2001). According to these studies, three determinants, namely, the characteristics of the victim, the perpetrator, and the organization each may engender violence in the workplace. The theory behind the characteristics of the victim as the main factor explains that an individual antecedent, such as the personality of victims (neuroticism) may constitute a source of conflict that the perpetrator addresses with violence (Coyne et al., 2000). However, this contrast with the view of other researchers (Hoel et al., 2003) who disagree with the notion that violence is related to pathologies, or psychopathic personality traits of the victim or perpetrator. The justification for the latter position is hinged on the fact that there is a paucity of evidence to support personality traits as antecedents of violence. In some studies where individual characteristics are considered the subject of study, victims with high anxiety levels, low self-esteem, introversion, neuroticism, and submissive personalities have been identified (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Notwithstanding, Di Martino et al. (2003) argued that the extent to which these personality traits can actually be considered a source of violence remains an open question. Leymann (1996) suggested that these traits should be interpreted as a "normal response to an abnormal" situation. As such, researchers (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006; Hirigoyen, 1998) have ignored the role of individual characteristics, and carefully argued that anyone can become the target of WV. Truly, as Poilpot-Rocaboy (2006) argued, "It is the interaction of individuals, the victim and perpetrator, and the work context that creates the situation of violence in the workplace at anytime."

Several studies have analyzed the socio-demographic characteristics such as age, marital status, and gender of workers in organizations and found that individual factors may enhance the incidence and process of WV (Di Martino et al., 2003; Hirigoyen, 2001; Paoli & Merllie, 2001). Some studies view WV as a perpetrator-victim relationship relating to power (Einarsen et al., 2003). According to these studies, it is the imbalance of power between the perpetrator and victim that constitute the central feature of violence. Accordingly, the imbalance of power is usually reflected within the context of the formal organizational structure, while power may be informally based on experience, knowledge, length of service, as well as access to support from influential persons. How vulnerable a victim is would therefore be linked with his/her social situation, such as an unstable home, physical characteristics, such as a disability, and economic situation, such as single income, may all affect the imbalance of power and increase the risk of being victimized.

Then it follows from the foregoing, the question to be asked is: is there any specific characteristic that distinguishes a perpetrator? While some researchers (Field, 1996; Hirigoyen, 1998) conceived personality such as the psychopathic personality of the perpetrator as a source of WV, others (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006) disregard this view on the grounds that a perpetrator does not necessarily have to be a mentally disturbed person.

In a study of WV directed against women, Zapf and Einarsen (2003) reported that, "perpetrators appear to be male more often than female, and supervisors and managers more often than colleagues." Further, the study identified three types of violence associated with some features of perpetrators. The first type of violence is perpetrated in order to protect one's self-esteem. Zapf and Einarsen (2003) argued that several researchers believe that protecting and enhancing self-esteem, defined as having a favorable universal evaluation of oneself, is a basic human motive that influences and controls human behavior in many social institutions. Thus, people with high levels of self-esteem are likely to manifest more violent behavior than people with low levels of self-esteem. A similar finding was earlier reported by Baumeister et al. (1996), who indicated that negative emotions of anger, anxiety, and envy, played a mediating role between self-esteem and violent behavior. For example, Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) established that shame and pride were linked to WV.

The second type of violence is that which occurs because the perpetrator lacks social competence. Absence of emotional control, reflection and perspective-taking are features associated to WV. For instance, a manager may express his anger by constantly shouting at a junior officer without knowing the effects of such behavior. And the third type of violence is conceived as a product of micro political wrangling (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). In this sense, WV is a victimization of another individual in order to improve one's own position and interest in the organization. This type of violence has been reported to be common at the middle and upper levels of an organization. For instance, male supervisors try to ensure male dominance of women in the workplace by giving high ranking positions to men. Any of these types of violence discussed above hamper the development of victims as well as the growth of organization that they work for.

The features that characterize an organization may be a predictor for WV. Hirigoyen (2001, 1998) revealed that WV occurred more frequently in certain occupations and organizations (e.g., such as the health and education sectors. This finding was corroborated by Di Martino et al. (2003) in a European survey on WV that found several high-risk occupations. The conclusion drawn from the surveys suggest that a higher risk of WV exist within the public sector than within the private sector. Other studies including that by Salin (2003) that explored organizational antecedents of WV classified the factors associated with violence into three groups: "(1) enabling structures or necessary antecedents (e.g., perceived power imbalance), (2) motivating structures or incentives (e.g., internal competition), and (3) precipitating processes or triggering circumstances (e.g., downsizing and restructuring)" (Poilpot-Rocaboy, 2006: 6). According to these studies, the WV is usually the result of interactions between structures and processes of the above three groupings. In other words, WV can be regarded as a product of structures, processes and reforms in organizations.

The studies reviewed so far are limited to European studies, as WV has received much attention in the West than in Africa. Therefore, I conducted a study on WV experienced by FPOs in Africa to enable a comparison between the two continents.

## METHOD AND MATERIALS

My paper relies on data from a recent exploratory study of Nigerian women prison workers' experiences of WV and the implications on their feelings of well-being. The study was conducted in two selected prisons from two States in southwestern Nigeria. The choice of these prisons was due to their proximity to the researcher and the fact that both prisons employed a more substantial number of FPOs as employees compared to other prisons.

The study design was qualitative in nature. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews constitute instruments for data collection. Sections of the two instruments specifically sought to establish what FPOs experienced as violence at work and its implication on their psychological health and social well-being. Altogether, 10 focus group discussions (5 in each prison) consisting of between 6 to 10 participants were conducted with selected FPOs within the junior, middle, and senior cadres. The criteria for selecting the respondents were hinged on experience; job status, job tenure, and willingness to participate in the study. In addition, four in-depth interviews were held with strategic FPOs, officers assigned special duties such as the special squad, whose assignments exposed them to a variety of WV. In total, 77 FPOs and 4 FPOs participated in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews respectively. From the two prisons, 81 out of 157 FPOs participated in the study. The smallness of the sample size was due to the fact that few women were employed in the prison service by the State government for reasons associated with cultural stereotypes.

The ethical and field protocols for this study were approved by the Research and Publications Committee of the Department of Sociology, Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria. Permission to gain access into the prisons for the study was sought and granted by the Comptroller of Prisons. During the discussions and interviews, effort was made to ensure that participants in each session were homogeneous in terms of their job status. This encouraged the participants to express themselves freely as well as enabled this study to establish if there were differences in the pattern of violence experienced by respondents in relation to their job status. Also, participants' consent to have their voices recorded was sought and approved—which gave the respondents confidence that it was purely for academic purpose. In addition to convincing the participants (through verbal discussions) that facilitators/interviewers were learning from them and not testing their knowledge, the participants were also encouraged to choose the setting for their discussions and ask the facilitators questions. The group discussions were conducted in locations and spaces free of the watchful eyes of the supervisors, threat of sanctions, and the influence of nonparticipating onlookers and gatekeepers. The focus group discussions lasted between 49 and 63 minutes while the in-depth interviews lasted between 29–30 minutes.

The data collected were audio-taped, sorted, and later transcribed with the help of field assistants. Data were analyzed using manual content analysis—reporting verbatim the responses of participants where necessary. Though the intent of the study was qualitative, an attempt was made to quantify some variables such as age, marital status, job tenure, job status, religion, and educational qualification.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### I. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents consisted of 81 FPOs whose ages ranged between 22 and 56 years. Specifically, 28 of the respondents were aged younger than 24, 42 were aged between 25 and 50, and 11 were aged 51 or above. The age distribution indicates that a high proportion of the respondents were in their most productive years. Forty-seven of the respondents were married, while 34 reported that they were single. Of the married respondents, a sizeable number (31) reported that the nature and location of their job made it impossible for them to reside with their spouse. The couples lived separately during working days, and the FPOs returned home weekly or monthly. On the other hand, 16 of the remaining married respondents indicated that their husbands lived with them. The religious affiliation of the respondents showed that more Christians (57) than Muslims (24) participated in the study. Generally, the respondents were literate having acquired some form of higher education : master's degree (7), bachelor's degree (20), diploma/advance level (41), and West Africa School Certificate (13). More than half (42) of the total number of the respondents were junior officers, followed by middle officers (27), and senior officers (12).

It is perhaps not surprising that so few women were in the upper tier of command, considering the limited access to education, women's reproductive timing, social/cultural beliefs, the "glass ceiling" barrier, and the *ayanmo syndrome* [a state of helplessness based on an external attribution of destiny] constitute reasons why fewer women attain top positions in organizations (Fayankinnu, 2003a; Anyemedu, 2000; Ofei-Aboagye, 2001; McFadden, 2001; Moser, 1998; Udegbe, 1997; Haddad, 1991; Awe, 1990). The majority of respondents (55) had spent between 1 to 9 years in service, 14 had less than 1 year in service, while 12 were in their 10<sup>th</sup> year and beyond.

### II. Experience of Workplace Violence by Female Prison Officers

In my attempt to address the first objective in this study, the participants in all the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews conducted were asked if they had experienced violent incidents as FPOs in their workplace. Findings from the study revealed that all the participants had experienced at least one form of WV directed towards them, by either their co-workers or prison inmates. Accordingly, all the 81 respondents stated that they had experienced verbal/psychological violence, 73 experienced sexual violence, and 38 reported incidences of physical violence. By implication, physical violence constituted the least experienced violence category by the respondents. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Fayankinnu, 2007, 2004; Akinbulumo, 2003; Jaffe et al., 2003; Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1996; Kurz 1995; Yllo, 1993; Dobash & Dobash, 1992). A factor that may account for this tendency is that physical violence can easily be detected and established in grievances attributed to the workplace, compared to verbal/psychological or sexual violence. Moreover, since offenders who are found to



have perpetrated physical violence in the workplace find themselves punished, given the available sanctions in place, I suspect that the perpetrators of WV tend to resort to subtle violence that are difficult to detect and prove, but which nonetheless have a negative impact on its victims nonetheless.

Data from the focus group discussions revealed that FPOs experienced different acts of WV. For example, abuses/curses and verbal threats were common among the verbal/psychological violence the FPOs reported to have experienced. According to one of the respondents (a middle cadre officer) said:

“Some of the most frequent abuses directed at us from colleagues [officers] include being called names such as; idiot, bagger [worthless tool], animal, shit, and devil [a dreaded person].”

Similar responses were heard from the majority of the respondents. It is important to emphasize that while many of the FPOs had these acts directed at them by their colleagues, they attached different meanings to the acts. For example, I found through the in-depth interviews conducted with both junior and senior FPOs that when such acts were perpetrated by a superior officer (either male or female), it was considered violence, whereas when they were perpetrated by a similarly ranked or even a junior officer—(either female or male) it was considered violence when committed by the latter but not the former. One reason given by one of the interviewees as to why different meanings were attached to same acts was that when junior female officers perpetrated such acts, they only exhibited such behavior to mimic and mock the senior officers who acted out the violence to victimize the FPOs. A logical inference from the foregoing is that junior FPOs did not perceive themselves capable of victimizing each other, since they recognized themselves to constitute the target of violence from other cadres. However, one may ask why both junior and senior FPOs considered the same acts as violence when the acts were exhibited from a junior male officer. The key response to this question from the majority of the respondents was that the similarly ranking junior male officers always seemed to want to prove that they were superior, when actually they were not. This is an indication of an organizational “culture” situated within the purview of patriarchy that celebrates a superior attitude exhibited by junior male officers towards their female counterparts.

Similarly, the study found that inmates victimized the FPOs by cursing them. During an in-depth interview, a senior female officer reported that:

“In the course of our duty, inmates call us several names that are demeaning and demoralizing. Some of the names include; *Iya Aje* [witch], *Were* [a mad person], *Oloriburuku* [an irresponsible person].”

These violent acts from the inmates may not be unassociated with the FPOs duties that demand strict compliance to ensure a successful rehabilitation of the inmates. Thus, unable to flout authority because they are incarcerated, inmates may resort to victimizing FPOs by cursing them, perhaps a coping means for the inmates to deal with the stress of incarceration.

As for verbal threats, a majority of the FPOs proffered that they had received several threats from their superior officers. According to the respondents, verbal threats from superior officers included some of the following comments:

You will be dismissed, I will transfer you to a “no man’s land,” you will be queried, you will be court-marshaled, watch it, you will be locked up in the guard room, you will not be promoted when due, I will shoot you, and I will report you to “*oga* [superior officer].”

The acts of violence enumerated above by the FPOs indicated that all, except the last two acts (I will shoot you, I will report you to *oga*), were associated with superior officers, while the rest were associated with the junior officers. This is understandable given that all, but the said two acts, require organizational power that grants certain privileges to senior officers, and makes possible the perpetration of such violence against the FPOs. On the other hand, junior male officers may resort to the said two acts to gain for themselves some relevance. This reaffirms the internalization of patriarchal power relations that I identified earlier among junior male officers. Such verbal violence is indeed psychological violence, because it impacts negatively on the targeted individuals’ social and mental well-being (Fayankinnu, 2007). An excerpt from one of the focus group discussions conducted with junior FPOs reads:

“Verbal violence demoralizes psychologically and renders you inactive. For example, I was threatened by a superior officer that I would not be promoted and actually I was not while my colleagues were. What would you have expected ... to be happy? Of course not! I was knocked down psychologically and could not organize myself for a long time at my work place.”

Needless to say, such an officer’s commitment to work may be reduced by the traumatic experience encountered.

Focus group discussion data also showed that the FPOs experienced sexual violence from two levels, from inmates and co-workers. Sexual violence from inmates directed towards the FPOs was limited to derogatory remarks and physical touches. Some sexually violent verbal remarks used by inmates to victimize FPOs included monikers: *omo to dun* (a pleasurable woman in bed), *koro esin* (black ebony woman, implying a wish to bed a beautiful woman), *bakassi penisila* (to call attention to the woman’s large buttocks), *milk industry* (suggestive of a desire for the breasts of the woman), and *eru labe* (literally, big penis). Physically, inmates casually gave a pat on the back of the FPOs in pretence of a greeting or as if to brush off something on the officers’ uniform when, in fact, the act was loathed on the part of the FPOs as insinuatingly sexual. Similarly, inmates clutched their fists against FPOs, deliberately pushed them aside when rushing for food, spat on them, and rough-handled them during jailbreaks, acts that the FPOs conceived as violence.

The FPOs reported to have experienced sexual violence from their co-workers in verbal, physical, and symbolic forms, particularly from male officers. Accord-

ing to the respondents, such verbal sexual violence included passing, pleasant, but nonetheless harassing remarks often about the FPOs, such as “You are very beautiful,” or “Ah, if I knew you before now I would have married you.” Other such utterances included the color of pants the male officers liked the FPOs to be wearing, bragging and boasting of the size of one’s penis, and direct and verbal sexual advances were found to be commonplace in the surveyed work environments.

Physically, FPOs reported having experienced unwanted touches from male officers. Male officers tended to hold on too long when shaking hands with the FPOs, during which time the FPOs’ hands could be squeezed, tickled or fondled. FPOs also experienced frontal hugging that with too much contact with their breasts, and uncomfortably having the male officers’ arms around their waists. A senior officer clearly made the point in a focus group discussion session:

“My hands have been squeezed times without number by male officers in pretence of exchanging pleasantries [apparently] not caring that I am married. Sometimes they hug you and hold on for a longer time such that you’ll be the one struggling out of the person’s hand.”

FPOs considered it excessively violent when male officers or inmates grabbed their genitals consistently in their presence, because it suggested that the perpetrators were sexually lascivious and wished to have sex with the FPOs. In other words, the respondents felt degraded when male officers or inmates grabbed their groin in plain view, as if they were indirectly referred to as sexually wanton counterparts, a suggestion that the FPOs found highly offensive.

From the foregoing, I found that there were differing patterns through which inmates and prison co-workers perpetrated sexual violence against the FPOs. While the latter adopted subtler methods, the former adopted a cruder method. A likely reason for the different methods may be the status difference of the inmates and co-workers: the latter being a bona fide employee of the prison services, while the former were incarcerated by virtue of statutory law for having been found guilty of committing a crime. Though both methods were of major concern to the FPOs, it appears that the subtle method used by co-workers poses more challenges for FPOs, as it may lead to the perpetration of further violence because of the limited recourse available for the FPOs to use against co-workers.

Apart from sexual violence experienced by FPOs, other acts of physical violence, although at a lower rate, directed at them by co-workers, were also reported by the FPOs. According to findings from the interviews, the FPOs received varying degrees of slapping from superior officers, particularly from female officers. An explanation for this may be that male officers were more likely to be sanctioned when they slapped FPOs. However, a slap from a superior officer, either male or female, seldom occurred. Other acts of physical violence that the FPOs experienced include: excess drills demanded from officers (particularly males) in pretence of fitness exercises, excessively frequent assignment of night duty, and transfer to prison stations inconveniently far from the officers’ homes. All these acts constituted a calculated means of punishing FPOs for turning down sexual

advances from the male officers.

What are the implications of these experiences for the FPOs? Findings from the study showed that FPOs manifested poor psychological health, due to violence experienced at the workplace. To arrive at this finding, the respondents were presented with some health indicators, and were asked to identify the ones that manifested after their encounters of victimization in the workplace. Among those mentioned were high blood pressure, constant headaches, intermittent sulking, poor sleep, anxiety, inability to concentrate, fever, sharp pains in the head, tension, fear, weight loss, profuse sweating and pain in the eyes. According to a junior officer:

“When I experience violence in the workplace, my blood pressure shoots up.”

One middle cadre officer said:

“I have constant headache and internal heat when I am victimized in the office.”

A senior officer reported:

“In my case, I sulk for seconds or minutes, feel drowsiness with blurred vision and sweat profusely. In fact, for some other persons, you hear them complain of something biting them inside their head or inability to sleep soundly in the night. Others become afraid and jittery, thereby increasing their heart beat and making them have chest pain.”

Previous studies have shown that WV has a direct relationship with low psychological health, and thereby reduces the workers' commitment levels given the decline in job satisfaction that used to be enjoyed by them. WV, without doubt, influences the workers' social well-being particularly as they become alienated in their workplace (Fayankinnu, 2007). This may explain why the respondents also reported that they felt that they lost their self-identity and sense of belongingness towards their job, which may manifest itself in tardiness and apathy on the part of FPOs.

## CONCLUSION

This study has identified vital issues that may contribute to future research initiatives in the neglected area of WV against women in male-dominated occupations. Researchers could go beyond the qualitative technique used in this study and employ quantitative techniques with a large sample size of respondents to test for multivariate relationships among variables to enrich their investigation.

This study concludes that FPOs constitute a vulnerable group who suffer specific types of violence during the course of discharging their occupational duties. The

study showed that the FPOs experienced WV in verbal, sexual, and physical forms. Critically, they experienced more psychological/emotional violence in the workplace compared to physical violence.

Subtler, but more effective patterns of violence may have been embraced by the perpetrators to victimize the FPOs. This insidious nature of psychological/emotional violence also appears to account for the infrequent reporting of violence by the FPOs, since much concrete evidence is usually required to establish that the act was perpetrated. Even when a FPO reported a case of victimization, because the panels constituted to handle such cases are usually male-dominated, few tangible results are achieved. Hence, FPOs agonizing experiences remain unameliorated in the workplace. An inference that may be drawn from the foregoing is that the subtler methods of victimization serves as a means through which gender differences are strengthened within the workplace in order to preserve male dominance.

The organizational culture of the Nigerian state prison that works to preserve male dominance in the workplace through violence poses a great threat to the psychological health and social being of the FPOs. The FPOs' compromised psychological health may not be unassociated with the fact that women prison workers experience more psychological/emotional violence than physical violence. For instance, FPOs who were victimized verbally reported that such an act was repeated time and again. They argued that such an act left them with no recourse than to brood over the incidents, until it happened yet again. The scenario is well captured in the report of a junior officer in one of the interviews:

Many a times I am assaulted verbally from my colleagues and inmates. The inmate case is understandable but how do you explain the case of colleagues? This type of attitude put one in a position of thinking to the extent that you begin to fall sick often and lose concentration on the job. Sometimes I feel like not doing this job any longer!

The quote above suggests two things: WV render FPOs vulnerable to psychological illness as a response to neurotic challenges affecting job performance and they may come to feel inclined to leave their job for a better situation. Such an urge to leave one's job is a function of alienation, a situation in which the FPOs are estranged from their work and feel a loss of self-identity, or social well-being. Adding to these implications, the FPOs may spend a large part of their income seeking health care.

Given the precarious state of FPOs in this paper, I suggest that more studies be conducted on workplace violence with particular reference to gender. To achieve this, research grants should be made available for qualified candidates to embark on the project. There is a need to review existing laws in operation within the Nigeria Prisons Service, specifically as it relates to sanctions meted out to the perpetrators of violence in the workplace with particular attention to gender. Similarly, mixed-gender special committees should be inaugurated to oversee issues concerning violence in the workplace. In addition, there is a need to ensure gender sensitivity while appointing members on such committee. Since this study

found that women in the male-dominated occupations seldom reported cases of violence to higher authority, there is much need to organize seminars, public lectures, conferences, etc., with the aim to sensitize workers on the legitimacy to report cases of violence, especially psychological/emotional violence including sexual violence and verbal violence, directed at female subordinates by senior male workers.

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